

The Epistle to the Romans (1)

Introduction:

The study of botany focuses on plant-life. Agricultural schools immerse themselves in stock maintenance and field development. Theology studies God. The study of God will understandably involve difficulties because God is so infinite in His Being. We must be ready to apply ourselves to learn if we are to learn about our awesome God and Creator. After having learned everything about Him that He has revealed to us, we must count on it that we are still on looking at the “hem of His existence.” (Job 26:14)

The letter to the Romans isn't an easy book to read or grasp (2 Peter 3:15-16) but neither is it an impossible letter to understand. Keep in mind that the apostle wrote this book to the “lower class citizens of Rome;” many of them were slaves. Some of them were probably not even able to read as they didn't have the opportunity to go to school. Yet they did read or hear and receive profit from Paul's letter. Let's seek God to grant His Spirit to enlighten your understanding in the truths Paul presents very logically and comprehensively in this letter. As Luther said, “Romans is a light and way into the whole Scripture.” When God opened his eyes for the cardinal truth of Rom. 1:16-17, he said “It was as if I walked into Paradise.” However, it is important to remember that we need to put forth real mental efforts. Each day a little time spent on this letter is far better than a rush study the night before our next study.

In this book Paul touches on all the cardinal themes of Scripture: *sin – law – judgment – faith – good works – grace – justification – sanctification – election – plan of salvation – work of Spirit – place of Jews and Gentiles within the church – life of godliness.* As Steele and Curtis remark in their book,

“Should the Spirit of God be pleased to reveal the contents of Romans to the church of the present generation, true revival would be upon us. God would once again be exalted as the all wise, all mighty Sovereign of heaven and earth – the Originator, Director, and End of all things, the One Who alone should be feared, loved, adored, worshipped, and served. The saving work of Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, would once again be proclaimed as the only hope of salvation for lost humanity. Sinful men would be taught to see themselves as they truly are – corrupt, depraved, helpless, without strength or hope apart from the mercy of God – mercy which He sovereignly extends to the undeserving objects of His free choice.”

You should read this letter repeatedly. At first you will feel very overwhelmed by the letter's content but keep reading and re-reading it. With the use of the outlines and comments I will share with you, the difficult passages will hopefully clear up. Therefore make it a practice to attentively and prayerfully read the passage studied. We will study the letter section by section, rather than chapter by chapter.

Background of Romans:

The purpose for the writing of this letter is not entirely clear. It is evident that the saints in Rome were quite well-grounded in the truth for Paul commends them for their soundness in both doctrine and practice. As all saints have need for growth, it may be that the letter was written to build up the saints in their faith and in the assurance of the certainty of the Gospel. In that case the purpose of the letter was more preventive than corrective. It also seemed to pave the way for Paul's coming to Rome. Paul has been thinking about going there for quite some time (Rom. 1:13; Acts 19:21).

Yet there were tensions within the congregation. In Act 18:2 it is noted that Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave Rome. In the absence of the Christian Jews, the Gentile Jews took over the leadership within the congregation. In AD 54 Nero allowed the Jews to return. This brought some tension in the congregation as to "who should have the leadership of the congregation." Paul's letter addresses this issue by showing that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 1:16). They are all united in Christ. Certainly, the Jews were privileged by God in OT (Rom. 3:1) but that has changed within the NT time. Various questions which are spin-offs of this changed position of the Jews are dealt with in this letter.

Brief and Basic Outline

I. Justification by Faith and Its Consequences: Chapters 1 – 8

Paul, after having opened the letter (1:1-5), states the theme of this letter which is "just shall live by faith." (1:17) He then proceeds to prove that all men (both Jews and Gentiles) are sinful and are in need for righteousness. Since all are lost and under the power of sin, man needs some method of justification other than that which is based on personal obedience. (ch. 2-3:19)

From ch. 3:20 Paul deals with the heart of the Gospel message, i.e. that Jesus Christ has done for sinful man what man could not do for himself. He brought in a perfect righteousness which is given to the sinner the moment he believes. This given (imputed) righteousness, which is received by faith, renders the sinner acceptable in the eyes of the Judge and therefore such a sinner is "justified" by God.

Paul then shows that being justified by faith, instead of causing someone to live in sin, inevitably results in obedience to God (ch. 6). Next he turns his attention to the function of the law and its limits. It can discover, condemn but not save or sanctify the sinner (ch. 7). Also, sin remains in the Christian as long as they are here on earth (ch. 7). This section ends on a high note though. Chapter 8 is the song of triumph for the true believer.

II. Temporary Rejection of the Jews and the Inclusion of the Gentiles as God's People (ch. 9-11)

In this part Paul deals with the perplexing question of the status of the Jewish nation. How could they turn away from Jesus while the Gentiles were receiving Him as their Lord and Savior? But these chapters aren't just an exposition about God's plans with the Jews. They are actually an answer to a perplexing and troubling question about God's faithfulness. For Paul wrote all kinds of wonderful promises in the previous chapters but how can God be trusted as it appears that He has broken His promises to the Jews for He seems to have abandoned them. Paul deals with this question by directing us to God's faithfulness in every decree as well as in His promises and prophecies within the OT. He proved from the OT that what is happening was actually prophesied. In the end Paul is God's spokesman in revealing that this rejection is neither total nor final confirming again the faithfulness of God's promises. He is trustworthy!

III. Practical Exhortations (ch. 12-16)

This last part is filled with practical instructions for believers, the life of sanctification. Paul points out the duties to God and the Church, to fellow believers and the world and also to their government. He dwells on how to live together as brothers and sisters in faith within the body of Christ.

Extended Outline¹

PART ONE **JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES** **Chapter 1-8**

- I. Paul's Introduction to the letter: 1:1-15
 - A. Paul identifies himself as an apostle set apart to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1-7)
 - B. He expresses his thankfulness to God for the saints at Rome and acknowledges his obligation and his eagerness to preach the Gospel to all men (1:8-15)
- II. The Theme of the Letter: the Gospel that proclaims the righteousness of God which is to be received by faith: 1:16-17
 - A. The free offer of salvation to all men without distinction (1:16)
 - B. Salvation by faith alone (1:17)
- III. All men are under the power of sin and therefore without any righteousness of their own; therefore no one will be justified by works of the law for no one has kept it 1:18 - 3:20
 - A. The Gentiles are sinful and are without personal righteousness (1:18-32)
 - B. The Jews are sinful and are without personal righteousness (2:1 – 3:8)
 - C. Summary and Conclusion: all are sinful and therefore no human being will be justified in God's sight by works of the law for no one has kept it (3:9-20)
- IV. Justification by faith established: sinners are justified on the ground of the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is received by faith 3:21-5:21
 - A. The Gospel method of justification by faith explained (3:21-31)
 - B. The case of Abraham and David cited as an illustration and proof the Gospel method of justification by faith apart from works (4:1-25)
 - C. Some of the blessings resulting from justification by faith (5:1-11)
 - D. The Gospel method of justification illustrated through a comparison of the saving work of Christ with the condemning work of Adam (5:12-21)

¹ This outlines is taken over from Steele and Thomas' book on Romans

- V. Paul shows how unfounded is the objection that being justified by faith apart from personal merit leads one to live a life of sin; on the contrary, grace is the supreme motive for obedience and inevitably results in holy living 6:1 – 7:6
- A. Those who are justified by faith cannot continue to live in sin, because, through their identification with Christ, they are dead to sin (6:1-11)
 - B. Because those who are justified by faith are not under the law (i.e. saved by keeping its commandment) but under grace (i.e. saved by the free mercy of God) they are therefore called upon to yield themselves to God as His obedient servants (6:12 – 7:6)
- VI. The function of the law, both before and after justification, is to reveal and condemn sin; but it does not and cannot produce holiness 7:7-25
- A. Before Paul was converted (saved) the law made sin known to him and thus caused him to realize that he was spiritually dead (7:7-13)
 - B. After Paul was saved he delighted in the law of God in his inmost self and served it with his mind but found that sin still dwelt within him and caused him to do the very evil which, as a believer, he had come to hate (7:14-25)
- VII. The justified, though plagued with sin and afflictions while in this world are nevertheless secure in Christ 8:1-39
- A. Through their identification with Christ, believers (though sinful in themselves) have been freed from the law and therefore cannot be condemned. Hence their salvation is certain (8:1-4)
 - B. Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who has regenerated them, who is also sanctifying them and who in the last day will resurrect them. (8:5-11)
 - C. Believers (through adoption) are, in their present state, the children of God and therefore fellow heirs with Christ (8:12-17)
 - D. Believers, though they must suffer various afflictions while in this life, are sustained through them all by the encouragement and help that comes from God (8:18-28)
 - E. Believers are assured of final salvation, for they have been predestined to eternal glory. (8:29-30)
 - F. God is for believers, therefore, they are safe; He gave His own Son to die for them and thereby to secure their justification and salvation (8:31-34)
 - G. God's love for His people is infinite and unchangeable, and nothing in all creation can separate believers from it (8:35-39)

PART TWO
The Rejection of the Jews and the inclusion of the Gentiles as God's People
Chapter 9 – 11

- VIII. The ultimate or eternal reason for the rejection of the greater part of Israel and the calling of the Gentiles to salvation is God's Sovereign Election : 9:1-29
- A. Before entering into the discussion of the rejection of the Jews, Paul expresses his deep concern and love for them and his respect for their national privileges 9:1-5
 - B. He next establishes the absolute right of God to with His fallen, sinful creatures as He pleases and shows that God has selected from among the Jews and from among the Gentiles particular individuals to save while rejecting the rest 9:6-24
 - C. The apostle then appeals to the Jewish Scriptures (OT) and shows that the salvation of the Gentiles and the rejection of the greater part of Israel had been predicted by the prophets. 9:25-29
- IX. The immediate cause of Israel's rejection and of the Gentiles' salvation was the different manner in which they responded to the Gospel: 9:30 - 10:21
- A. The Gentiles were receiving God's free gift of righteousness by faith and were being justified, whereas the Jews (ignorant of God's gift of righteousness in Christ) were still trying to work out a righteousness of their own and were perishing 9:30 - 10:4
 - B. The legal and gospel methods of justification are contrasted for the purpose of showing that the legal method is beyond the reach of sinful men, but that the Gospel method is simple and adapted to all men without distinction. 10:5-13
 - C. The Gospel of Christ is not only adapted to all men but must be sent (preached) to all men if any are to be saved. 10:14-17
 - D. The Old Testament prophets foretold of the universal spread of the Gospel and of the inclusion of the Gentiles as God's people as well as of the rejection of the Gospel by Israel 10:18-21

- X. The rejection of the Jews, as to number, is not total; as to time, it is not final 11:1-36
 - A. The rejection of the Jews is not total. 11:1-10
 - B. The rejection of the Jews is not final . 11:11-32
 - C. Paul ends with doxology, adoring the all-wise, all mighty Sovereign God, Whose resources, wisdom, decisions, and methods are beyond man's comprehension. God is Himself the Origin, Director, and End of all things 11:33-36

PART THREE
PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS AND PERSONAL MATTERS
 CHAPTER 12-16

- XI. Practical Exhortations 12:1 – 15:13
 - A. Duties to God and to the Church: 12:1-8
 - B. Duties to fellow believers and to the world: 12:9-21
 - C. Duties to civil authorities: 13:1-7
 - D. The duty to love one another: 13:8-10
 - E. All duties should be viewed in light of the fact that salvation is nearer than when we first believed: 13:11-14
 - F. Instructions concerning Christian liberty: 14:1 - 15:13
- XII. Personal Matters: 15:4 – 16:33
 - A. Paul explains his own feelings and relationship toward the saints at Rome 15:14-33
 - B. He sends personal greetings to various individuals at Rome: 16:1-16
 - C. The apostle warns the saints to have nothing to do with those who cause dissensions and difficulties by opposing sound doctrine – such persons are false teachers; they are not true servants of Christ! 16:17-20
 - D. He conveys the greetings of his companions to the Roman saints. 16:21-23
- XIII. Concluding Doxology: 16:25-27